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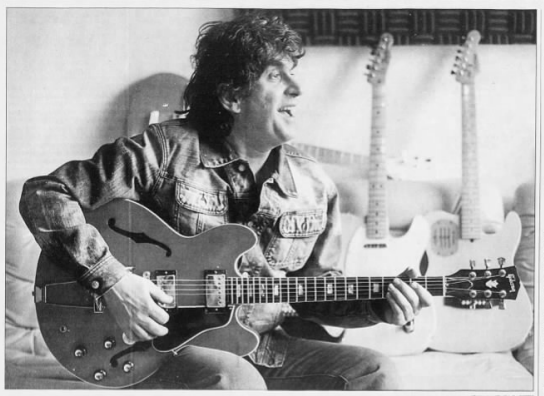

JOHN MAHONEY, GAZETTE

Michel Pagliaro sits with his guitar at his home in Montreal. The 53-year-old rocker has been called "the real Springsteen" by U.S. critic Richard Meltzer.

REVIEW

The Godfather's still got it

Pagliaro's show had elements of greatness, hampered by a haphazard pace

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
Special to The Gazette

FRANCOFOLIES

Le Parrain du Québec Rock, as Michel Pagliaro is known, now looks like the Godfather in sunglasses. Hendrix hair and a loose black shirt shielding his gut. In other words, at 53, he looks impressively larger than life.

Pag is Canada's pop enigma, the best rocker in the world that few folks outside Quebec know much about.

The man hasn't helped his cause by going missing in action – a seven-year hiatus in the 1980s (spent largely in France producing discs for Jacques Higelin), and his last "new" album dates back to 1989. Since then, the obsessed studio hound has worked on a now-mythic follow-up (supposedly set for release later this year).

His show at Metropolis on Friday night as part of the FrancoFolies had all the elements of greatness that some swear by (U.S. critic Richard Meltzer once called him "the real Springsteen"). Unfortunately, the show's haphazard pace, which eventually yielded 13 songs, did his reputation no favours.

As per custom, he opened with his first major hit, 1969's J'ai blanché Pour un Nation. Then he launched full-throttle into the evening's tour de force, Emeute Dans la Prison, his adaptation of Riot in Cell Block #9 (a 1954 Leiber and Stoller song by the Oakland group the Robins that sold 100,000 copies on the West Coast). Pag was full of comic macho swagger, packing a mordant rock solid punch and mock-Drugnet documentary style.

After making his stand, what did Pag do? He left the stage to Les Respectables, who are fine under his marching orders but pale by themselves. Close to an hour later Pag returned with Le Temps Presse, a song of desperate urgency ("Ohhh, quelle scène, scène!") that was now ironic relief.

Toward the evening's end, Pag inexplicably handed the reins to the group for a tune that cut the momentum.

Still, there's enduring magic in Pagliaro's songs – popcraft at its zenith – and the way he relishes attacking them. L'Espion is the flip side of Every Breath You Take and every bit as haunting. Here there's no deceit: he's a hapless lovelorn "spy." "Traque dans un désert de solitude."

Fou de Toi, more of a Parisian take on pop, bounced along with unbridled joy for a crisp three minutes and 20 seconds. Setting up Lovin' You Ain't Easy, one of his crafty Beatles-esque classics from 1976, he asked how many were born by then. After a round of cheers, he paused, arched those thick black eyebrows over his shades, and slyly singled out a group of hot teen babes crooning the stage: "Heh, not up front!" The song is propelled by an ingeniously pithy story-telling structure, like a mini-opera.

There was Dangereux, with galloping, hard-charging ("peace, baby!" he yelled announcing the bridge), Pag in full-throat Little Richard mode. His neck bulging, he pursed his lips as he yelled "Louise!"

The redefined reggae rhythm of Héros complemented its endearing message. "T'as pas besoin d'être un héro pour être quelqu'un." This, of course, was the cue for another heroic solo by Jerry De Villiers, whose cast-iron guitar matches Pag's intensity and anchors his crack band of key boardist Josh Lebofsky (from Sainte-Foy), bassist Mathieu Cormier (Montpelier) and drummer Andrea Vu (Saigon).

Les Bambos, yanked 15 years ago out of headlines that don't seem to go away, is arguably the best-conceived protest song ever. By now Pag delivers it stern-ly, as a matter-of-fact militaristic march. An infernal dive-bombing solo from De Villiers had us running for cover.

It wouldn't be a Pag show without J'Entends Frapper, unofficial theme song of the 1970s revolution in Quebec society (and biggest-selling 7-inch single ever), filled with benchmmie.

Yeah, we hear you knocking, but can we have more next time?

◆ *Juan Rodriguez's E-mail address is jrodxxxx@hotmail.com.*

REVIEW

The formidable and forgettable

The festival had its highs and lows, but over-all, shows that fringe voices thrive

FRANCOFOLIES

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
Special to The Gazette

COURTESY OF AUDIOGRAM

Mara Tremblay delivered a knockout performance.

The FrancoFolies is like the jazz festival: not for purists, or the faint of heart. But the over-all message is more specific. The wide variety of musical styles presented was a testament to their survival at the margins of the American-British corporate pop axis – sometimes thriving by assimilation, with a diffidently francophone touch.

Anomalies and other weirdness piled up over the fest's course: A stormy Sunday night devastated attendance at an unlikely pairing of local star Catherine Durand, cute (impressive eyebrows) and perfly packed into 1970s bell-bottoms, and Luke, offering alt-rock clichés with expert nonchalance.

If nothing else, Durand was a trooper, seizing upon the empty dance floor and sparse gathering as yet another opportunity to fling back her long, wavy hair like they do in shampoo ads, proclaiming this was the kind of show folks will wish they had seen. (Not unless you slaver for simplistic confessionals buttressed by cookie-cutter pop-rock.)

By the time Luke got on, it was 12:30 a.m. and maybe a couple dozen diehards were left. Tussle-haired singer Thomas Boulard, with a jingle-jangle Rickenbacker guitar and a load of studied petulance, seemed mystified: "Alors, nightlife in Europe starts at midnight and here it's ... la nuit." (Oops, caught us on a bad night!)

A few songs later he dissed the import-price of the group's just-released debut album La Vie Presque. "C'est trop cher," he blurted, tremulously announcing to the near-empty room: "You have the right to copy it on Québecois territory. Voilà, copie-le." Famous last words, or the start of something big?

Copycat eclecticism got the better of Tarmac, formed last year by two of Louise Attaque's sidemen, the terribly earnest singer-guitarist Gaëtan Roussel and overly busy violinist and multi-instrumentalist Arnaud Samuel.

Missing from this smorgasbord of worldly influences was humour and subtlety. In trying to be everyman, they become empty ciphers. Similarly, In Vivo seemed DOA by proving that, bien sûr, wacky sitar strains spice up flaccid dub-flavoured hip-hop rock.

Perhaps they suffered in comparison with Mara Tremblay, a 32-year-old in pigtails and pregnant with her second child. Relaxed, confident, ambitious, she was a knockout. Country music might well ground her, but that's only where her richly layered rock sound takes off. When she picked up the violin there was 20th-century dissonance lockeying with folk forms. Heartfelt and curious, Tremblay is clearly an artist to follow in years to come.

The trim, taut, clean-headed Dominique A, a time is now. He's dramatic enough as a singer, with a strange, haunted, almost disconnected voice quivering tunes that barely cling to the rails. Minimalist but hardly empty, he and three sidemen served up a gritty guitar sound packed with portent (with its vaguely oriental modalities).

Wired coil-tight, but with theatrically supple artist movements, Monsieur Ané delivered the goods. (This concert had considerably more presence than A.'s recent fine Auguri collaboration with P.J. Harvey producer John Parish.)

The best pure performers at festival, in my view, have been Saian Supa Crew, super-slick (impeccably attired) burb boys from Paris and, by the way, linguistically super-sophisticated (making the likes of pan-international ist Mama Chan look like panhandlers).

Eschewing DJs, they drop ur'saamy impersonations of today's randomized cut-and-paste techno-reach. SSC bring it all back home to porch-level humanity (André-Phillipe Gagnon meets Run DMC, more Rube Goldberg than Inspecta Clouseau). Buddah Mic, the human "international best bet," ran a stunning routine, conjuring technology with a human face. Super cacophonic, "plein des vibes positif."

Ingenious! Could it be that only the French could reinvent the surface of nouveau Americana for a more-substantial – and universal – message than dominant run-o'-mill, money-grubbing rap?

As they say, à suivre ...

REMOTE CONTROL
BASEM BOSHRA

This show is on the case

A look ahead at tonight's TV

What to watch: Crime & Punishment (CFCF-12, CJOH-8 and WPTZ, 5, 10 p.m.), the superb documentary series from Law & Order kingpin Dick Wolf, examines the bizarre case of Alfred Garcia, a man accused of flying in to a violent rage and stabbing his wife – leaving a gruesome 8-inch wound in her chest – after she came home one night to find him wearing her lingerie.

San Diego Deputy District Attorney Tracy Prior has two hurdles to clear if she hopes to secure Garcia's conviction: the defense's assertion that the attack was in self-defense and the fact that the victim is now so guilt-ridden over her husband's predicament that she's trying desperately to save him from being found guilty.

What to avoid: Even when you don't have to pay upwards of $13 for the privilege, sitting through an insipid Freddie Prinze Jr. flick like **Boys & Girls (M1, 10:45)** still leaves you feeling totally ripped off. (Let's face it, that's 96 minutes of your life you're never getting back.)

What else is on? The second and final part of **The Windsors: A Royal Family (WETK-33, 9 p.m.)** picks up with Elizabeth II's ascension to the throne and follows the triumphs and travails of the extended royal brood all the way through to the death of Diana.

Speaking of Brits, **Coldplay**, the umpteenth U.K. band over the last few years to be dubbed "the next Radiohead," stop by **Musiqueplus** for a live musical performance and chat at 7 p.m. You can judge for yourself.

Finally, is the dating world ready for Count Rish? Well, they'd better be because the resident puppet vampire on **Greg The Bunny (Global, cable 3 and WFFF-44, 7:30 p.m.)** is getting back in the game. Prediction: this doesn't work out well for anybody.

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IQuiz
ARTHUR KAPTAINIS

Is it hot enough for you?

Here's a hot topic: titles with the word summer in them.

1. What hit album of 1974 was in fact a reissue of material from 1962-65?
2. Which sex-packed film of 1959 featured a haunting (or sappy) tune by Percy Faith?
3. Compared to what, according to a poet, is his subject "more lovely and more temperate"?
4. What jubilant round of 1250 hits remained reasonably current in modern English?
5. Hermie yearns for Dorothy, a woman whose husband has enlisted. Which novel and film?
6. What lullaby is sung by Clara in an opera of 1935?
7. Whose last film for MGM was Summer Stock (1950)?
8. Who are The Boys of Summer of Roger Kahn's best-seller?

Quiz answers are on Page A15

What's on?
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